

St. Philomena

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Catholic Story **COLORING BOOK**

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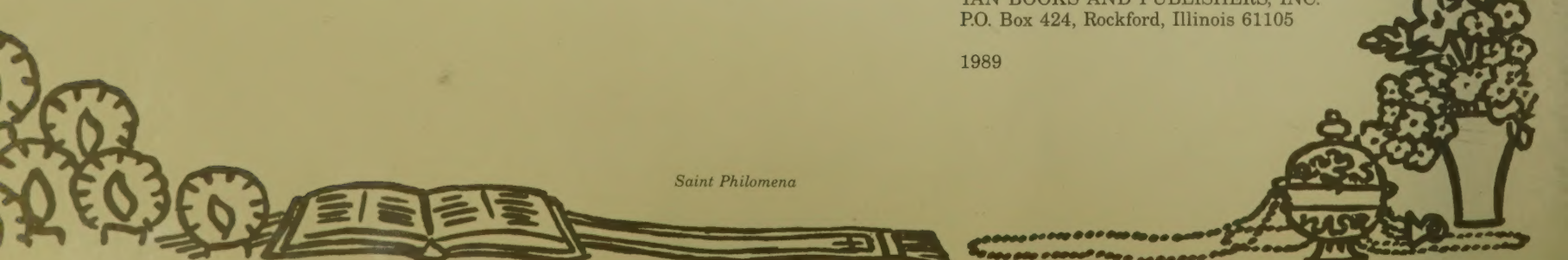
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This book belongs to

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CHAPTER ONE

IN the year 304 (so the story goes), a certain Greek prince was greatly worried about the welfare of his country. It was reported that the Roman Emperor Diocletian was planning to send his armies to lay waste the land.

"Dear God, what are we going to do?" demanded the prince fearfully. "We'll be no match for the pagan legions of Rome. . . ."

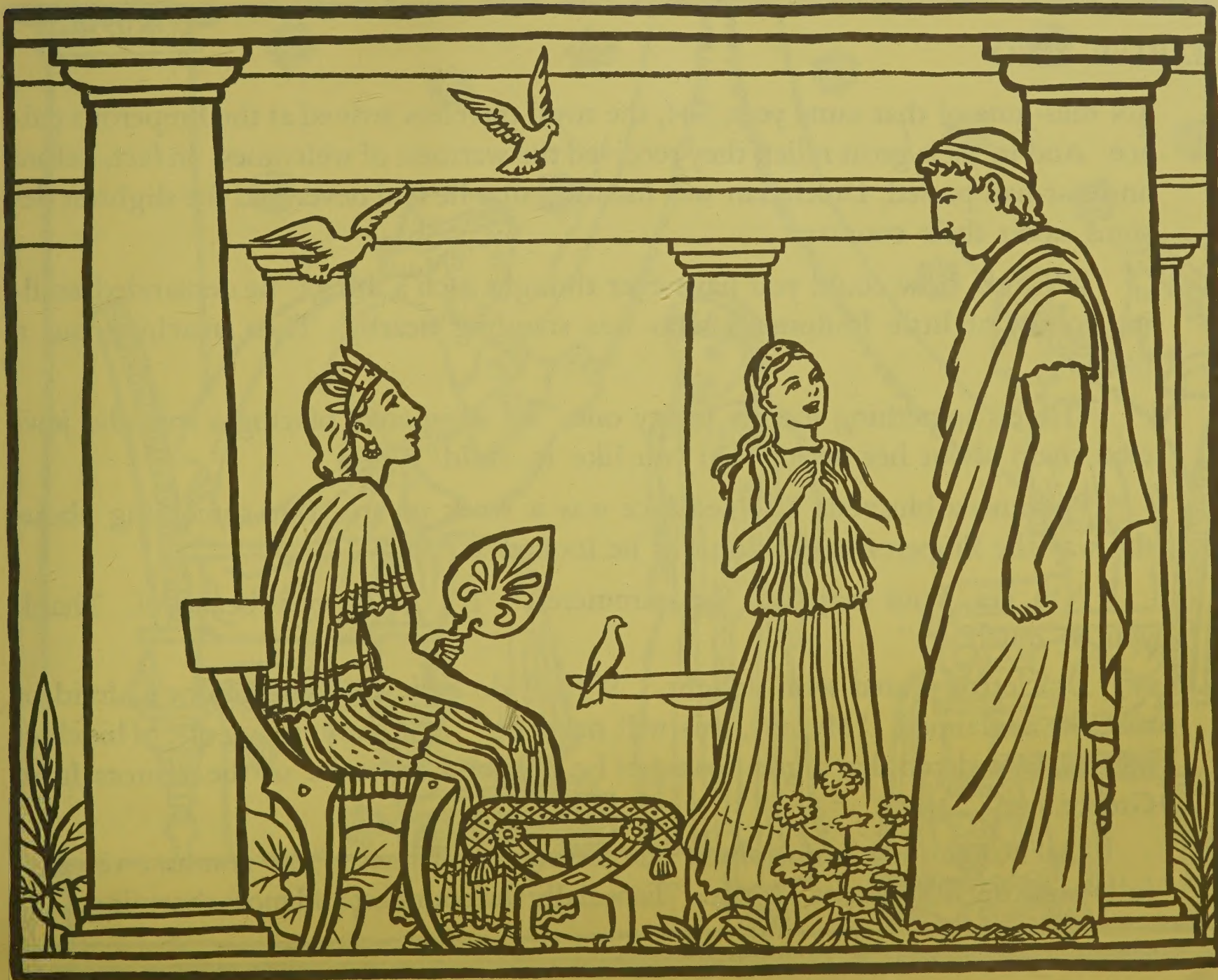
The prince's counselors, Christians like himself, were also troubled. Then it was decided that the prince should go to Rome with valuable gifts for the Emperor. It could be that the visit would result in some kind of understanding between the two countries.

"That is a good idea," said the prince's wife hopefully. "And if Philomena and I were to go along, too—my dear, you'd like a trip to Rome, wouldn't you?"

Thirteen-year-old Philomena, the couple's only child, nodded eagerly. "Oh, yes, Mother! Especially if it would keep the Emperor from making war on us."

A smile crossed the prince's troubled face. What an understanding wife he had! As for Philomena—surely there was no prettier child in all Greece?

"Then that's what we'll do," he declared. "God willing, everything will turn out well."



CHAPTER TWO

IN mid-June of that same year, 304, the royal travelers arrived at the Emperor's palace. And to their great relief, they received the warmest of welcomes. In fact, before an hour had passed, Diocletian was insisting that he had never had the slightest designs upon their country.

"Friends, how could you have ever thought such a thing?" he demanded, smiling fondly at little Philomena who was standing nearby. Then, reaching out a hand—

"Here's something for my pretty one," he whispered, placing a splendid jeweled chain about her neck. "Do you like it, child?"

Philomena blushed. The necklace was a work of art. But something about the way the Emperor spoke, the way he looked at her—

"Oh, yes, Your Majesty!" she stammered. "It's . . . it's very beautiful. Thank you so much. . . ."

Diocletian roared with delight. "Why, I do believe this little one's afraid of me!" he exclaimed. "My, my, this will never do!" And summoning one of his chief officers, he ordered that a great banquet be prepared in honor of the visitors from Greece.

"All Rome must know about our distinguished guests," he announced, playfully stroking Philomena's wrist. "Especially the youngest and most charming. . . ."



CHAPTER THREE

PHILOMENA'S parents were greatly relieved to find the Emperor so friendly, of course, but they were soon worried on another score. Diocletian already had a wife, yet he had fallen in love with Philomena and now wanted to marry her, too.

"No, no!" sobbed the little princess when she heard this. "It'd be a big sin!"

The father and mother looked at each other in horror. What was to be done? If Philomena should refuse the great honor of being Empress—

"It'll mean war at home after all," moaned the prince, burying his face in his hands. "Perhaps even death for our little one. . . ."

His wife brushed back her tears. "Maybe there's a way out," she ventured hopefully. "Even if we are Christians, even if Diocletian already has a wife. . . ."

But Philomena shook her head. "No, there's no way out, Mother. Long ago I promised Our Lord that I'd never marry anyone. You see, I've always loved Him so much . . . and I wanted to prove it by some kind of sacrifice. . . ."

Now the parents were more frightened than ever. As for Diocletian, he was beside himself with fury when he heard of Philomena's attitude. "So the Christian God means more to you than I do?" he stormed. "Well, we'll see about that, my girl. Maybe a taste of prison will bring you to your senses."



CHAPTER FOUR

PHILOMENA'S prison was a dark and filthy dungeon, her food only bread and water. For some five weeks the Emperor came here every day to taunt the little girl (who had been chained to the wall), for her refusal to deny the Christian faith. Her parents also, half out of their wits with grief and fear, begged her to reconsider his proposal. But Philomena only shook her head.

"I can't!" she sobbed. "It wouldn't be right!"

Yet when she was once again alone, the thirteen-year-old looked about in terror. The Emperor had always been accustomed to having his own way. Unless she gave in to him soon, he would surely have her horribly tortured. And she had always been so afraid of pain!

"Dear Lord, what am I going to do?" she moaned.

Then, on the thirty-seventh night of her captivity, Philomena awoke to find the gloomy dungeon glowing with an unearthly light. Our Lady, holding the Christ Child, had come to comfort her!

"Don't be afraid, little one," she said kindly. "Three more days of suffering, and then you will leave this state of pain."

Philomena's eyes shone. What a glorious vision! And how good to know the heavenly ones were pleased with her!



CHAPTER FIVE

THE next day Diocletian tried in vain to make Philomena renounce her Christian faith. "Very well," he sneered. "Maybe this will make you change your mind." And calling two of the prison guards, he ordered that Philomena should be brought before the court and beaten with heavy whips.

The parents could scarcely believe their ears. Their child, a princess of Greece, was to be treated like a common slave? They hastened to the court.

"Sire, our little one didn't mean to offend you!"

"No, no! There's been a dreadful mistake!"

Diocletian drew himself up haughtily. "Mistake! What mistake?"

"Oh, sire, don't you see? Philomena's only a child! At first she was . . . well, rather shy about being an Empress, but now. . . ."

"Now she wants only to please you. Don't you, dear?"

Philomena looked calmly at her parents. Once she had been afraid merely to think of suffering. But suddenly God's grace had come, that marvelous strength given in time of need to all who honestly ask for it.

"No, I'd rather die than consent to this sinful marriage," she said bravely.

Diocletian sprang to his feet, his eyes glistening. "Beat that stubborn little fool!" he roared. "Beat her without mercy!"



CHAPTER SIX

SO Philomena was cruelly beaten. But wonder of wonders! That night two angels anointed her wounds with soothing oil, so that when Diocletian arrived to gloat over her sufferings, he found not even a scar remaining from the day's frightful ordeal.

"Well, little one, the great god Jupiter must have healed you so that you can be my wife," he smirked.

Of course Philomena refused to listen to such nonsense, whereupon the infuriated Emperor had her thrown into the Tiber river, a heavy anchor about her neck. But once again angels came to the rescue, and she experienced no harm. Then, when all attempts to shoot her to death with arrows had failed, Diocletian grew desperate.

"This girl must be a witch!" he burst out. "The evil spirits are always protecting her!"

The Roman Christians (who had long suffered at Diocletian's hands), knew better. God, they said, had sent the little Grecian princess to give them courage in their own trials. Already many had gone fearlessly to prison because of her example. And there had been several conversions. But even as they rejoiced, word came that Philomena was dead. By order of the Emperor, a lance had just been driven through the back of her head. Now heaven had a new saint—aged thirteen!



CHAPTER SEVEN

BY dint of careful planning, the Christians managed to obtain Philomena's body and carry it to the catacombs—that maze of underground passageways where they were accustomed to bury their dead. Here they sealed the little martyr into a shelf along the wall, marking the place with a simple inscription in bright red paint: PEACE BE TO YOU, PHILOMENA. Then various designs were added—a lily, arrows and an anchor—to symbolize the child's purity and the tortures she had endured.

"Perhaps some day she'll be found and given all the honors due a saint," they told one another hopefully.

But during the next nine years, because of continued persecution of the Christians and the burial of many other martyrs in the catacombs, Philomena's story gradually faded from men's minds. Indeed, it was not until fifteen hundred years later—on May 24, 1802—that some workmen digging beneath the streets of Rome chanced upon her tomb.

"Philomena!" mused one, gazing at the painted inscription, still a brilliant red, on the wall. "Now, who can she be?"

Soon many other people were asking the same question. But all to no avail. Nowhere did the ancient writings mention a Christian martyr by the name of Philomena.



CHAPTER EIGHT

STILL, there was no doubt that the newly-discovered tomb held the bones of a young girl who had died from a lance thrust through the base of the skull. And the fact that a vase of dried blood had also been found in the tomb gave the traditional evidence that she had been a Christian martyr. So, with great reverence, the holy remains were transferred for further study to the Treasure House of Relics in Rome.

However, when three years had passed, interest in Philomena's cause began to wane. After all, this child was only one of thirteen unknown early Christians whose relics were stored at the Treasure House. And since long and earnest study had revealed nothing definite about her, and since she had not worked any miracles—

"No, no! We mustn't lose faith in little Philomena!" exclaimed Father Francis di Lucia, a young priest from Mugnano, a small town about twenty miles from Naples. "I'm sure she has a message for us."

Don Bartholomew di Cesare, Bishop-elect of Potenza (who had come with Father Francis to Rome), looked up curiously. "A message, Father?"

"Yes, Your Excellency, especially for young folks. After all, wasn't she a virgin-martyr? Didn't she know and love the virtue of purity? Ah, if I could just have her relics for my little church in Mugnano. . . ."

The Bishop-elect smiled. "Maybe you will," he said.



CHAPTER NINE

FATHER FRANCIS scarcely dared to hope for such a great favor. Yet two months later, on July 1, 1805, when he was ready to set out for home, the precious relics were presented to him by the Bishop, who had himself received them as a gift from the Roman authorities.

"B-but Your Excellency!" stammered the happy young priest in amazement. "I... I don't really understand..."

The Bishop's eyes twinkled. "Don't try to understand, Father. Just ask Philomena to bless my work. That's all."

Of course Father Francis was much concerned as to how and where he would keep his new treasure. Thus, it was a great relief when the Bishop suggested that a wax or papier-maché figure of a young girl, displayed in a glass casket in the parish church, would be an ideal resting place.

"You could probably have such a figure made in Naples, Father," he said. "And I'm sure that a good friend of mine there, Donna Angela Terres, would be glad to dress it for you."

And so it was arranged. But scarcely had Donna Angela (a victim of incurable cancer), set about clothing Philomena's image in the finest of silks and velvets, than she began to tremble for joy.

"The awful pain is going!" she burst out. "I... I do believe the little saint is curing me—"



CHAPTER TEN

SOON there seemed no doubt that Donna Angela had been miraculously healed through Philomena's intercession, since the best doctors in the city freely admitted that all signs of her disease had disappeared. Yet it was in Father Francis' church in Mugnano that Philomena really proved herself. Here, during the next thirty years, scores of blind, deaf and crippled people were restored to perfect health after praying before her relics. Indeed, Philomena's shrine finally became one of the most popular places of pilgrimage in all Italy.

The little martyr's fame also spread to France. And in Lyons, in the spring of 1835, a thirty-six-year-old invalid named Pauline Jaricot prayed long and earnestly that Philomena would cure her, too. A devoted friend in the nearby village of Ars, forty-nine-year-old Father John Marie Vianney, did the same. Other friends were anxious about the effects of the journey when Pauline suggested making a pilgrimage to Mugnano, but he was not. Why shouldn't Philomena obtain God's merciful blessing on this young French woman who had done so much good by founding the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Association of the Living Rosary?

"Go ahead, Pauline," he urged. "Don't let anything keep you from making a pilgrimage to Philomena's shrine."



CHAPTER ELEVEN

BUT Marie Melquiond and Father Henry Rousselon, also Pauline's friends, were exceedingly troubled as they presently set out with her on the six-hundred-mile trip to Italy. And no wonder, when she could no longer walk for weakness and had to travel in an invalid's chair.

"She'll never leave France alive," they told each other uneasily.

Guessing their thoughts, Pauline sighed. Philomena might not be a canonized saint (despite all the miracles attributed to her during the past thirty years), but she loved and trusted her just the same. "Do prove yourself to my friends!" she begged silently. "Please, Philomena—"

But despite these and other prayers, Pauline collapsed when she reached Rome. And on the day that Pope Gregory the Sixteenth came to thank her for all the good work which she had done for the Church, he felt certain she was dying.

"Remember me when you go to heaven," he urged.

Pauline smiled. "Oh, yes, Your Holiness! But what about Philomena? If she cures me at Mugnano and I come to see you on my way back home, walking like anyone else, you'll do something about her cause?"

The Pope nodded hastily. "Of course. That would be a miracle of the first class." Then, to those standing nearby: "Poor little thing, how ill she is! She'll never come back from Mugnano alive. . . ."





BECAUSE of her illness, Pauline was forced to remain in Rome for some six weeks. But on August 8, 1835, more dead than alive, she finally reached Mugnano where excited preparations were being made to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the arrival there of Philomena's relics. And though the actual date was still three days off, already the streets were gay with flags, Father Francis' church was ablaze with candles, and everyone was in extraordinarily high spirits.

"Our little saint is going to cure you, Mademoiselle!" came a chorus of encouraging voices as Pauline was carried to Philomena's shrine. "Don't worry about anything!"

"That's right. Just keep on praying."

The invalid smiled gratefully. How kind everyone was! How childlike in their faith! Yet the next day, faint after hours of prayer in Father Francis' church, she turned to Marie Melquiond in dismay. Several of Mugnano's more spirited citizens had just invaded the sanctuary and were now pounding excitedly on Philomena's glass casket.

"Are you deaf, little saint?"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Cure this poor French lady, or it's all over between us!"



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“MARIE, they shouldn’t do that!” whispered Pauline fearfully. “It...it’s not right. Please, won’t you tell them to stop?”

But Marie could do nothing. By now the people of Mugnano were deeply disappointed in their little wonderworker. Twenty-four hours, and not a single miracle! Couldn’t Philomena realize that her reputation was at stake? And the honor of the town, too?

But the next day, August 10, all was well. During Benediction at church, the little Roman martyr had finally worked a complete cure for Mademoiselle Jaricot.

“What did we tell you?” came the chorus of eager voices. “Isn’t our Philomena all-powerful with God?”

Tears of joy streamed down Pauline’s face. For fifteen months she had not been able to walk unaided, but now—

“Yes, it’s true!” she sobbed. “Oh, how can I ever thank her?”

Soon a parade had been organized in Philomena’s honor, and Pauline found herself marching through town behind a brass band while the air echoed to lusty cheers and the booming of church bells.

“There’s the lady our little saint cured!”

“My, how happy she looks!”

“And how well she marches!”



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

FOR the next nine days Pauline remained in Mugnano, her invalid's chair on prominent display with the canes and crutches left at Philomena's shrine by happy pilgrims like herself.

"Dear friends, I'll be back again soon," she told the cheering crowds who came to say good-bye on the day of her departure. "And I'll do everything possible to make our little saint known and loved."

At Naples (since the story of her cure was already known there), more crowds gathered. But it was in Rome that Pauline experienced her greatest happiness. The Holy Father was all but speechless as she knelt at his feet!

"This . . . this can't be Mademoiselle Jaricot!" he exclaimed.

Pauline's eyes shone. "Oh, yes, Your Holiness! Don't you remember how I hoped Philomena would cure me at Mugnano? Well, she did! And now—oh, you do remember your promise?"

"About promoting a further study of her cause if you were cured? Yes, Mademoiselle, I remember. But first, hadn't we better make sure that there's been a true miracle? Come, let me see you walk."

So Pauline crossed briskly from one side of the audience chamber to the other, then through several great rooms of the Vatican, her heart pounding for joy at the growing wonder in the Holy Father's eyes.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SO that priests and doctors might carefully study her cure, Pauline remained in Rome for some nine months. Then, early in June, 1836, she returned to Lyons.

"Didn't I say little Philomena would cure you if you just had faith?" exclaimed Father John Marie Vianney excitedly. "Oh, surely nothing's going to stand in the way of her canonization now!"

Pauline hesitated. Philomena's cause was progressing, although the old stumbling-block still remained—certain scholars insisting that it was not right to canonize anyone, even a wonderworker like Philomena, when so little definite information was available. The fact that three people, including a Dominican nun, Mother Louise of Jesus, claimed to have seen the young martyr in a vision and to have been told about her journey to Rome, her sufferings under Diocletian and many other extraordinary things, meant little. Even the holiest souls could make mistakes, believing to be true what was merely a dream. And yet—

"Yes, Father, I do think Pope Gregory is going to canonize Philomena one of these days," said Pauline earnestly. Then, with a little smile: "Did you like that relic of her I sent you from Italy?"

The priest's eyes shone. "Like it, Pauline? Why, it's the most beautiful gift I ever received!"



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ON January 30, 1837, as Pauline had hoped and prayed, Pope Gregory the Sixteenth declared Philomena to be a Saint of God. Now the Universal Church might pay public honor to her, especially on August 11, her feast day.

What joy in Mugnano now! At last the little girl who had preferred death to sin was receiving the recognition for which she had waited more than fifteen hundred years! And there was no less joy in Ars and Lyons, where Father Vianney and Pauline Jaricot threw wide their doors so that all might come to venerate their relics of the new little saint.

"Philomena's already helped us," they said, "but now she's surely going to help many more people, too."

True enough. Saint Philomena's fame as a wonderworker soon spread far and wide, even to America, where a fine church (the first named for her in the New World), was built at Pittsburgh in 1839. And as the miracles continued—sight for the blind, hearing for the deaf, strength for crippled arms and legs—the little virgin-martyr became even better known and loved.

"To Philomena nothing is impossible," one person told another.

"That's right. She really is all-powerful with God."





St. Philomena

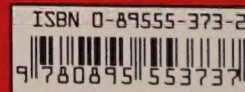
Text by
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Philomena's wealthy parents had decided to visit the Emperor in Rome, and 13-year-old Philomena went with them. But in Rome, trouble arose. The Emperor, who was not a Christian, decided he wished to marry the beautiful Philomena, although he already had a wife. But Philomena had promised Our Lord she would never marry.

The Emperor was very angry, and he threw Philomena into prison to change her mind. There Our Lady appeared to her, giving her the grace to be brave in suffering and never to consent to the sinful marriage. The angry Emperor had her beaten—but angels healed her wounds. Then she was thrown into the Tiber River with an anchor around her neck—but angels rescued her. Finally, the Emperor ordered a lance to be driven through the back of Philomena's head: her faithful soul went straight to Heaven. The Christians buried her body in the catacombs.

Centuries later, in 1802, workmen digging beneath the streets of Rome discovered Philomena's tomb. Her relics were moved to Mugnano, Italy, and many miracles began occurring there—blind, deaf and crippled people were cured. When a very sick woman named Pauline Jaricot was cured after prayers to Philomena, the Holy Father had a study made. Then in 1837 he added her name to the list of saints. Over the years many people have received favors and miracles from St. Philomena—the little saint known as “the wonderworker” and “Philomena, powerful with God.”



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